



Student Activities 1-4

Women in Rome: Clodia in Context

Activity 1

Read the following accounts about these five famous Roman women. As you read, think about the following:

- What each tells us about Roman values and expectations of women.
- Which woman you think most confirms to the ideal *matrona*, married woman and mother.
- How they compare to Clodia. Try putting aside Cicero's portrayal and asking yourself what we know about her outside of Cicero.

Cornelia: The mother of the Gracchi brothers. She was the daughter of Scipio Africanus, conqueror of Hannibal and her husband was Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus a renowned general. She was stoical and Plutarch records that she 'bore her misfortunes with great nobility' (Renshaw 2012: 168). She was held to be representative of the ideal Roman *matrona*, loyal to her husband. Moreover, she was scrupulously attentive to her sons' education and careers, and was ambitious for them. She was highly educated and Plutarch records how she entertained important foreign visitors and engaged in learned discussion with them. Cornelia had a statue dedicated to her and its base can now be seen in the Capitoline museums. It was erected in her lifetime and later renovated by Augustus.

Servilia was the mistress of Caesar and was the mother of Brutus, Caesar's assassin. She was from a patrician family, highly educated, and an important influence on her half-brother, Cato the Younger. She was a politically assertive lady and she is even recorded by Cicero as attending meetings of the senate following Caesar's death to ensure the safety of her family. Her affair with Caesar did not, it seems, damage her reputation.



Terentia: this feisty lady was Cicero's wife from c.80 BC-c.46 BC. She and Cicero were married *sine manu*, meaning that Terentia kept control of her property when she married. She was well educated and seems to have been highly capable, managing the family finances, arranging her daughter Tullia's dowries for example, and even proved herself politically active. She played a leading role in the campaign to bring Cicero back from exile in 57 BC, and he would praise the courage and determination that she showed in working for his return. Terentia also showed concern for Cicero's depressed state in exile, not revealing to him the full details of the persecution, she and the rest of the family suffered in his absence. Later, in the early 40s BC when Cicero was facing financial difficulties, he began to be suspicious of Terentia. The marriage became increasingly strained and they divorced in 47 or 46. Was Cicero right to be suspicious? One cannot be sure, but Terentia seems to have been perfectly successful in her role as wife, mother, and family accountant for many years prior to the souring of the marriage.

Octavia was considered a model matrona. She bore her husband Mark Antony two children and later she also raised his children by Cleopatra as though they were her own. Romans took a dim view of Antony's rejection of Octavia, who was highly respected. She was never anything less than a faithful wife to Antony. He refused to see her when she arrived with troops and money in 35 and divorced her in 32. Octavian made this betrayal part of his propaganda campaign to blacken Antony and Cleopatra. He argued it was evidence Antony had abandoned Rome as well as his wife in favour of Egypt.

Arria. Pliny (Letter, 3.16) describes Arria as renowned for her great courage and loyalty. Seeking to spare her sick husband grief while he was ill, she concealed the news of their son's death and arranged the funeral without his knowledge. She showed him only calm composure every time she visited him. Her steadfast loyalty was further shown when she remained by her husband Caecina Paetus when he was arrested for his involvement in a rebellion against Claudius. Pliny relates how when her husband Paetus was arrested and taken back to Rome by ship, she determinedly followed on behind in a small fishing boat. Adamant she would not live without him, she took her own life alongside him, stabbing herself first, simply declaring 'Paete, non dolet' – 'Paetus, it doesn't hurt'.



Activity 2: Two Women of Roman myth

Cloelia: According to legend, Cloelia had been taken as a hostage under a peace treaty with king Lars Porsenna of the Etruscans. She swam the Tiber back to Rome defying Porsenna. Cloelia rallied several of her fellow maiden hostages and they swam across the Tiber while the Etruscans rained arrows down on them. They were returned upon Porsenna's demand, but the king, impressed by her great courage, allowed her to return with a select number of hostages of her own choice. She chose several young men who could return to fight for Rome. She was rewarded with an equestrian statue, an honour usually granted only to men.

- Does Cloelia seem typical or atypical of women of the Roman republic?
- What made her so famous and why did the Romans honour her so?
- Do some research into Greek mythical women. How does Cloelia compare?

Lucretia: the lady whose assault and rape triggered the events which lead to the establishment of the Republic and the overthrow of the kingship in Rome. She was married to Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, a Roman nobleman, and was regarded as a virtuous and loyal wife. Lucius was at dinner one night with friends (or so he thought), including Sextus Tarquinius, son of Tarquinius Superbus the last king of Rome. Boasting about their wives, Collatinus said none were fairer or more laudable than his wife Lucretia. He invited them to his home, where they found Lucretia dutifully tending the household. She was beautiful and Sextus burned for her. He entered the house when she was alone one night and told her that he had his sword at her back and he would kill her if she resisted. He raped her. Lucretia bravely revealed all to her husband and his friends. She then drew a dagger and killed herself as she didn't want to live unworthy of Collatinus. To cut a long story short, defending her honour and rebelling against the tyranny of the Tarquins, Collatinus and Brutus overthrew the monarchy and became the first consuls of Republican Rome.

- Compare Lucretia and Cloelia. In what respects are they similar/different?
- Which of the historical women described above is Lucretia most like?

General Questions

- Is there a wide disparity between how Roman women of myth are depicted versus the reality?



Activity 3: Collective Action from the Ladies

A fine example of Roman women collectively exerting political pressure comes from the period of the Hannibalic War. In 215, a sumptuary law, the *lex Oppia*, was passed restricting the amount of gold a woman could possess and limiting her public display of wealth. However, the ladies of Rome decided they were not going to accept this law remaining in place after the war and they flooded out to the Capitol blocking the streets and entrances to the forum. The law was repealed in 195 following their demonstration.

- What does the episode tell us about women at Rome and their freedom to appear in public, including how they were allowed to dress?
- Did women of fifth-century Athens ever engage in such political action?

Now compare the following passage from Polybius, the Greek historian (*Histories*, 31.26.1-9).

Translation: https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Polybius/31*.html.

The first occasion was the death of the mother of his adoptive father. She was the sister of his own father, Lucius Aemilius, and wife of his grandfather by adoption, the great Scipio. He inherited from her a large fortune and in his treatment of it was to give the first proof of his high principle. This lady whose name was Aemilia, used to display great magnificence whenever she left her house to take part in the ceremonies that women attend, having participated in the fortune of Scipio when he was at the height of his prosperity. For apart from the richness of her own dress and of the decorations of her carriage, all the baskets, cups, and other utensils for the sacrifice were either of gold or silver, and were borne in her train on all such solemn occasions, while the number of maids and men-servants in attendance was correspondingly large. Immediately after Aemilia's funeral all these splendid ornaments were given by Scipio to his mother, who had been for many years separated from her husband, and whose means were not sufficient to maintain a state suitable to her rank. Formerly she had kept to her house on the occasion of such functions, and now when a solemn public sacrifice happened to take place, and she drove out in all Aemilia's state and splendour, and when in addition the carriage and pair and the muleteers were seen to be the same, all the women who witnessed it were lost in admiration of Scipio's goodness and generosity and, lifting up their hands, prayed that every blessing might be his.



B L O O M S B U R Y

Cicero describes Clodia as having despoiled her statue of Venus to adorn herself with her gifts from her 'lovers' (51). In light of the above passages, do you think Clodia was really as 'atypical' as Cicero is suggesting?



Activity 4: Pro Clodia

Imagine you are Clodia. You have just through Cicero's stinging attack on your character and credibility. You have been given the chance to defend yourself. This can either be in the form of a speech or a letter to be displayed in the forum. Compose your defence. You need to think about:

- Your relationship with Caelius – what has he lied about? How did you help him and support his rising career while you were together and while he was still on good terms with your brother? Why is he not a reliable witness?
- Defend your conduct and character.
 - Which examples of famous Roman women could you appeal to in order to justify your behaviour?
 - Cicero has twisted your actions to portray you as a prostitute. How are you going to argue against his aggressive attack?
 - Why should we not trust Cicero?
- What else might you employ in your defence?

Suggested Reading

May, J. M., (1988) *Trials of Character: The Eloquence of Ciceronian Ethos* (Chapel Hill)

Especially, chapter IV, 'The *Post Reditum* Speeches', pp.88-127.

Pomeroy, S. B., (1994) *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (Pimlico).

Renshaw, J., (2012) Chapter 3, Section 5, 'Women' in *In Search of the Romans* (Bloomsbury), pp. 159-173.

Skinner, M. B., (2011) *Clodia Metelli: The Tribune's Sister* (Oxford)

Wiseman, T. P., (1993) *Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal* (Cambridge).

Chapters II and III on Clodia and the trial respectively are still essential reading.